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The Predestined Biographer of McKinley.

As an orator and literary artist, Mr. JOHN HAY reached his highest plane of achievement in the address at the memorial session of Congress. Three months ago at the Chamber of Commerce banquet his brief incidental tribute to the greatness of McKinley's character touched the heart of the nation. At that time Mr. HAY unconsciously indicated himself as the man of all men to pronounce the eulogy at the historic ceremony of yesterday. The universal recognition of the Secretary of State's preeminent fitness for that honor has been quite independent of the circumstance of his official station. In the oration before the Senate and the House of Representatives Mr. HAY fulfilled all the expectations based on his previous performances. His sympathetic conception of the significance of President McKinley's life and death is presented in beautiful rhetorical form, wherein the dignity and sobriety and melody of phrase impress the hearer like the music of a requiem. This is genuine art; and in this case it has shaped the utterances of philosophical insight, adequate knowledge and finely discriminative appreciation. It has been Mr. HAY's lot to be closely associated with two American Presidents whose great careers have ended in tragedy. History will gain if the definitive biography of WILLIAM MCKINLEY shall in course of time be written by the same hand that gave it the life of ABRAHAM LINCOLN. We sincerely hope that the purpose to perform this task of love and duty is already fixed in Secretary HAY's mind.

Prince Henry's Speech.

Prince HENRY's speech at the Staats-Zeitung dinner had this good-natured ending to it: "Allow me to conclude by saying that if you wish to grasp the hand which is a friendly one, and which under the circumstances is anything but mailed, you have only got to look for it and you will find it." (Prolonged cheering.) Delphic, perhaps. That is, in so far as it was suggestive of an alliance between the United States and Germany. If it stood for nothing more than an expression of friendship warmed by the spark of momentary hospitality, why then it was gracefully said, and is to be credited with entire sincerity. The United States, however, would much rather make ten friendships than one alliance.

Is Peace in South Africa Within Sight?

Those who wish well to the Boers have hoped that terms might be offered them less unacceptable than the demand for unconditional surrender. There is some reason to believe that the hope may be gratified, if we can trust the report that Lord KITCHENER has been recalled and will leave Cape Town early in April. It is scarcely credible that so capable a commander would be withdrawn against his will from a scene of active operation, and he cannot want to leave South Africa unless he has ground for thinking that the war is practically at an end. Such a conclusion can only be based on the knowledge that conciliatory overtures have been made, and that they are likely to be accepted.

The rumor of Lord KITCHENER's speedy return, coupled with the natural desire of King EDWARD VII. to see his coronation preceded by the attainment of peace, lends color to another report, also current in London, that, after the rejection of the Dutch offer of mediation, Lord KITCHENER was instructed to enter into communication with Gen. BOTHA, with a view to the arrangement of a peace on the lines suggested by Lord ROSEBERY. That is to say, while the Boer demand for independence is, of course, rejected, and England insists that the South African Republic and the Orange Free State shall be transformed into a single crown colony, concessions which under the circumstances may be described as liberal, are proposed to the Boer commanders in the field. It is said to be promised, for instance, that in the appointive council of the new crown colony, Boers shall figure as well as Englishmen, and, although the latter will at first preponderate, the former will, ultimately, have an equal number of seats. It is further stipulated, we are told, that, when the country shall have become definitely pacified, it shall pass from the status of a crown colony to that of a self-governing Commonwealth, like Natal.

Touching other points, also, the concessions are alleged to be generous. Thus from the amnesty to be granted to all Boer combatants are to be excluded only a few men who are accused of murdering prisoners and natives. We assume that the citizens of Cape Colony are no longer to be excepted from the beneficiaries of amnesty, for if they are, the negotiations will come to naught. Of the Boers already exiled, we are assured that all will be brought back to South Africa, an assurance that seems to cover the return, not only of Gen. CRONJE from St. Helena, but also of President KRUGER and of the Boer delegates who have been representing their countrymen in Europe. If no conspicuous politician or General has been

barred out, the British negotiators will have avoided the mistake made during our Revolutionary War, when such men as HANCOCK and SAMUEL ADAMS were blacklisted. In one particular the offer said to have been made to Gen. BOTHA goes further than any other overture of the like in history, by promising a grant of money for the rebuilding of Boer farms. Under all the circumstances, antecedent and existent, the best terms which the British Government is likely to offer are those which we have just outlined, and, perhaps, these would not have been suggested but for King EDWARD's exemplary wish that the war may be ended before he is crowned.

The Low Amendments.

The two amendments to the Charter advocated by Mayor Low seek to take from the Board of Aldermen all the power which the Charter gives them over the fixing of salaries, the creation of new positions, the consolidation of existing positions and the readjustment of titles. The power to make these changes is now lodged in the Aldermen and the Board of Estimate and Apportionment. If the amendments are adopted, they will cut out the Aldermen from all authority in the matter and place the whole power on the Board of Estimate and Apportionment.

Mayor Low in the letter which he sent to Albany explains that the only object of the proposed amendments is to facilitate the reorganization of the departments of the city government, and he particularly disclaims any intention of weakening the administration of the Civil Service laws. For Republicans there is another side of the question to be considered, and that is the possible political effect of such power as the amendments would confer on the Board of Estimate and Apportionment.

There are sixteen votes in this board. Mayor Low casts three of them. President CROMWELL of the borough of Richmond, a Republican, casts one of them. The others are all cast by Democrats. Comptroller GROTT and President FORTNES of the Board of Aldermen have three apiece. President CANTOR of Manhattan and President SWANSTROM of Brooklyn have two each. President CASSIDY of Queens and President HAFEN of The Bronx have one each. All of these men are Democrats, and all of them are anti-Crocker Democrats. HAFEN is the only one who maintains even a nominal allegiance to the present Democratic organization in New York city.

There is no improbability that all of these men will be working unitedly together for the success of the Democratic party soon. If that condition of affairs should come about, they would control the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, and any stray Republicans may be in the employ of the city would be likely to catch it.

The Republican organization has not received rewards so rich from the victory of the Fusion ticket last year that it can rashly put into the hands of the Democrats a weapon that may be turned against the few men loyal to it that are on the city payroll. It would seem preferable to accomplish the Mayor's desires in some other way.

The Moral Tone of Our Society.

Our correspondents who essay to trace back to a particular cause and time the origin of the "wave" of moral depravity, which they assume is now sweeping over our metropolitan society, go very far afield in their philosophic search. If there is any such "wave" it had its rise in no single and especially determinable circumstance of a generation ago or any other precise time in the past.

Neither has anything taken place to demonstrate that there has been any signal moral deterioration in this community during the last generation. The disclosures of depravity which have been made recently may have revealed certain features of novelty, but in general character they are not essentially different from those exhibited generations ago; and the very circumstance that their exposure shocks the moral sense of the community so greatly is a sufficient indication that the moral tone of the public is sound. In some respects it is sounder than in the past, or, at least, more delicate. The public attitude toward social vice, for example, was more tolerant twenty-five or fifty years ago than it is now. Vicious conditions and exhibitions which then were taken as a matter of course now shock the public taste and sensibility and provoke loud protest. Licentious or dissipated courses and habits then viewed and treated indulgently as pardonable human frailties are now reprobated with severity and loathing, and they are far more injurious to the reputation of those known to be addicted to them.

The cause most influential in bringing about the overthrow of Tammany at the last election was undoubtedly the revulsion against it of popular feeling due to the exposure of the "cadet" system. Surely that was a very convincing exhibition of moral sensibility in the public. The development of the system was a proof of depravity in those who pursued it, but it did not demonstrate the sweeping of any great "wave of moral depravity" over the community, for it was confined to a narrow district and was not an indigenous product, but an importation from parts of Europe, brought over with comparatively recent immigration.

We hear much in these days of the divorce scandal "in the circle of fashion," but no recent records of the divorce cases in that social sphere have revealed a moral depravity lower than that disclosed in famous suits of the sort in that society in the New York of an earlier period. Open and universally known offenses against the moral code of decency once tolerated in public men of the highest distinction and greatest popularity, and treated as scarcely a blemish on their characters, would now quickly bring into fatal reproach the most brilliant reputations in public life. One of the most efficient causes of the popular respect for President ROOSEVELT is the spotless moral purity of his life; yet there was a time when license

and dissipation lessened in no way the popular idolizing of men of the highest distinction in our official life, and such exhibitions were rather usual than extraordinary among them. In proof of this it is only necessary to run through the earlier history of this Republic. Political criticism on grounds of moral delinquency or offense is far closer and sharper than it used to be.

In all this there is no indication of "a wave of moral depravity;" it seems rather to be a wave of moral cleanliness that is sweeping over us. But, unquestionably, there is now an influence which tends toward social decadence, and it proceeds from the loss of idealism or from a spirit in the new generation which makes or pretends to make poetic idealism a butt of ridicule and an evidence of bubbling "freshness."

Not long ago, at one of our playhouses where the prices of admission are smaller than those at the run of the more considerable theatres—though fully as large as those prevailing at the best houses twenty-five years ago—"Romeo and Juliet" was presented and very creditably; but it was surprising to find that the most romantic love passages, the most poetic expressions of the passion of love, were received in the crowded audiences. They seemed to treat them as "guff," to have no responsive sentiment in their hearts, to be beyond the reach of any appeal to idealism. This profanation of poetic sentiment, too, was not by humble working girls, for they would have been aroused and uplifted by its romance, but by young women for the most part, apparently, who came from at least relatively well-to-do homes and were supported by them.

The incident is a symptom of what we mean in suggesting that society in our time is suffering from the effects of a "wave" which is sweeping away the idealism which is the salt that savors society and preserves it from the degradation of sordid materialism.

The Boer and the President.

We believe there is no parallel for the vulgarity of the action by Lieutenant-Governor TILMAN of South Carolina in withdrawing from President ROOSEVELT an invitation which the President had accepted. The invitation was to present to Major JENKINS, at Charleston, a sword on whose scabbard had been engraved some words of the President eulogizing Major JENKINS's gallant service. Every gentleman of South Carolina must blush for the shame that the Lieutenant-Governor has brought to the Palmetto State.

This Tiltman boorishness is, of course, "revenge" for the President's withdrawal of Senator TILMAN's invitation to attend the dinner at the White House in honor of Prince HENRY of Prussia. Senator TILMAN had just insulted the Senate of the United States by browbeating on the Senate floor, and brought upon himself the Senate's condemnation. And because President ROOSEVELT took notice of the affair, as the Senate had done, and, as, in courtesy to his guest, he was bound to do, South Carolina warns the President away from her borders!

If South Carolina cannot succeed in overriding her Lieutenant-Governor's rudeness with an apology completely humble and decent, so much the worse for South Carolina.

We have long known our esteemed contemporary the Cincinnati Commercial-Tribune as a journalistic pirate, but its raid upon the Sun's column is marked with an artistic finish in advance of anything we have observed hitherto. The Commercial-Tribune not only reprinted without credit the poem concerning Prince HENRY published by THE SUN on Feb. 19, entitled "Westward the Star of Empire," but to make deception still more sure, it struck out the initials of the genuine poet, "W. J. L.," and substituted a fictitious set, "L. B. B." The Commercial-Tribune's next wrinkle should be worth watching for.

Mrs. COLLIS P. HUNTINGTON's declaration, on her arrival from Europe last Wednesday, of \$75,000 worth of dutiable goods, chiefly dresses, and her payment thereon of \$31,800, makes us wish that the late NELSON DINGLEY could have lived to see. When preparing the Dingley bill, the existing duties on the millinery predicted that the customs duties on passengers' baggage would yield annually \$100,000,000.

They never have yielded annually a million. If all home-coming citizens had been like Mrs. HUNTINGTON, not of course as to wealth, for that would be impossible, but as to frankness in describing the amount and cost of dutiable goods, would the annual approach to the million mark have been nearer than it is now? Nobody knows. But we feel that public acknowledgments are due to Mrs. HUNTINGTON for her large contribution as a returning tourist to the national exchequer, and to her rigid and good-spirited respect and submission to the law.

Tiltman and Emmet.

To the Editor of THE SUN—Sir: In today's SUN there appears a singular letter signed "Celt," protesting "against the action of the persons in charge of the Robert Emmet celebration, to be held next Sunday evening, in selecting Senator Benjamin Ryan Tiltman as the principal orator of the occasion." Now, I am competent to handle the subject. As an American citizen of Irish birth, and a great admirer of the immortal Emmet, permit me to commend the action of the persons in charge for selecting the distinguished Senator from South Carolina as the orator of the evening. The true admirers of Emmet are all anxious to see and hear him.

NEW YORK, Feb. 25.

To the Editor of THE SUN—Sir: The objections urged by "Celt" against Senator Tiltman being the orator at the Emmet entertainment are lame and impotent. To say that Senator Tiltman is the representative of "white supremacy" is a gross reflection on the fair name of South Carolina. If this accusation be true the members of the white supremacy league which elected him are of the same type as he, and the people who elect such men to State legislatures are of the same type as they.

It is not wise when he concealed his identity, for his position in this matter is absurd and grotesque. EDWARD DWYER. NEW YORK, Feb. 25.

REISS PROMPTLY ACQUITTED.

Comments by a Man Who Slept With Engine 68.

To the Editor of THE SUN—Sir: Henry W. Russell, who yesterday upon the "Electrician," in a communication to THE SUN, paints in rather dull colors the exploits of our Fire Department, a department of which we are proud. With your permission I would like to say a word in its defense. Possibly I have not had the wide experience in electrical matters that Mr. Russell has had, nor have I had the opportunity of comparing our department with that of Newark, N. J., but I am sure that the men of the Fire Department, seen on men at work at scores of fires, and, what is better, I recently passed a night with Engine 68 and turned out twice with the company in response to alarms.

To the Editor of THE SUN—Sir: The letter printed yesterday in the SUN calls for a few words, not in defense of, but in justice to the Fire Department of New York. Had Mr. Russell construed Chief Croker's words correctly he certainly never would have uttered so many of his erroneous impressions. When Chief Croker stated "This fire never would have happened in New York," he was right, for our buildings are mostly modern and our fire companies are well equipped. The records of the principal thoroughfares of New York, Newark and other smaller cities. Conflagrations such as happened in Waterbury, Norfolk or Paterson, cannot take place in New York.

Now, Mr. Russell's uncle may be the author of the statement that "Newark's fire loss is much lower, in proportion to its size and population than New York's," but, barring two deaths and one hundred and twenty-five injuries, Newark has no structures to compare with the large ones of New York. If Newark would not cause as much monetary loss as would a destructive fire in any of our cities, it would certainly not cause as much loss of life and property.

In regard to apparatus, I would like to ask Mr. Russell how many other cities, other than New York, have as many fire engines as we have? How many other cities have as many fire houses as we have? How many other cities have as many fire companies as we have? How many other cities have as many firemen as we have? How many other cities have as many fire trucks as we have? How many other cities have as many fire ladders as we have? How many other cities have as many fire hooks as we have? How many other cities have as many fire axes as we have? How many other cities have as many fire pails as we have? How many other cities have as many fire buckets as we have? How many other cities have as many fire shovels as we have? How many other cities have as many fire saws as we have? How many other cities have as many fire axes as we have? How many other cities have as many fire pails as we have? How many other cities have as many fire buckets as we have? 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